

Chef Cooking Demonstrations

One of the most successful events at farmers' markets is hiring a chef to come to the market to cook seasonal produce, meats and other products and offer samples to the customers of the market. Not only do these events lend a festive air to the market day, but they give customers ideas on how to select and prepare the products. Research has shown that featured products do enjoy increased sales.

As a means to accommodate this unique form of product marketing and promotion, ensure market accountability, and provide a means for ensuring a safe, wholesome product, Kentucky's Food Safety Branch recently developed a uniform set of guidelines and requirements for farmers' markets-related chef cooking demonstrations. The guidelines have been distributed to local health departments across the state. In order to promote uniformity and farmers' market food safety across the state, all farmers' markets that intend to conduct chef cooking and sampling demonstrations are required to operate in accordance with these guidelines and requirements.

Kentucky Department for Public Health—Food Safety Branch Policy Regarding Chef Sampling of Products Cooked on Site: Small samples of cooked foods prepared at a farmers' market for promotional and educational purposes may be offered free of charge to consumers without the vendor having to obtain a "commercial" temporary food-service permit from their local health department. A sample is defined as a food product promotion where only a sample of a food (or foods) is offered free of charge to demonstrate its characteristics. A whole meal, individual hot dish or whole sandwich is not recognized as a sample.

In all instances, however, the vendor shall comply with all provisions (limited menu, approved source, food protection, insect control, hand and utensil wash, product temperature maintenance, etc.) of Kentucky's temporary food-service regulations (see below), but shall not be required to observe the same time limitations (14 days maximum operation/30 days before same location set up) as those placed on "commercial" temporary food-service operations. Local health departments retain the authority to inspect these operations under Kentucky's Food, Drug & Cosmetic Act and may inspect on a routine or for-cause basis. So that there are no surprises, it is expected that the market manager or market board will contact the local health department and advise the local health inspector of the market's intentions to host a chef cooking demonstration and cooked product sampling event.

Vendors who offer food product samples in portions larger than the above-noted definition of "sample"; those who charge a fee for their samples; or those vendors, who offer both free samples in combination with meal-sized portions, whether free or for sale, are not eligible for this exemption. Instead, such vendor operations shall fully comply with all requirements of Kentucky's Retail Food Code for operation of temporary food establishments, including fees, time limits, etc.

It is important to note that this sampling guidance is specific to meats and produce that are cooked on-site at farmers' markets. In all instances meats and produce that are utilized in these demonstrations must be obtained from an approved source. "Approved source" as it relates to meat and poultry typically means that the product was obtained from a USDA-inspected plant and that it bears the USDA mark of inspection.

This guidance does not cover the sampling of raw, fresh, uncooked ready-to-eat produce (such as melons, tomatoes, etc.) that are processed/cut on-site. Given the typical conditions under which these items are grown, our knowledge of foodborne illnesses attributed to improperly washed produce, the general lack of water under pressure (necessary for removing soil and pathogens prior to cutting) at farmers' markets, and lack of a pathogen-kill step such as cooking, on-site processing and sampling of uncooked, ready to eat produce at farmers' markets and similar settings presents additional food safety risks.

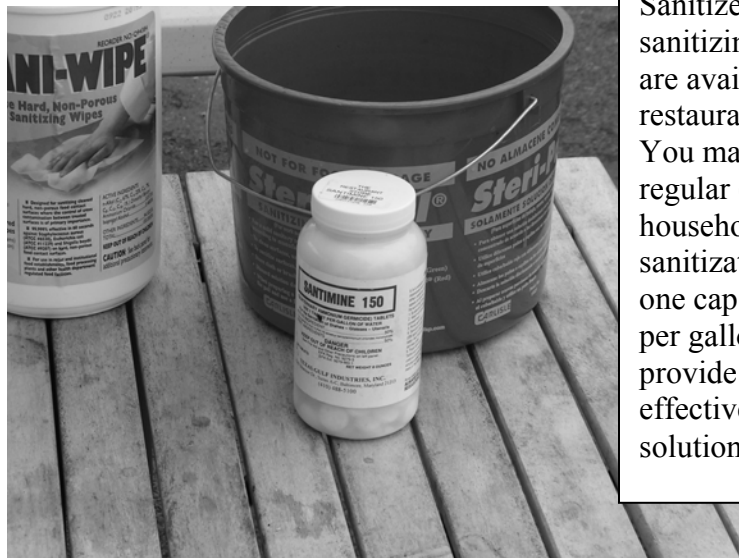
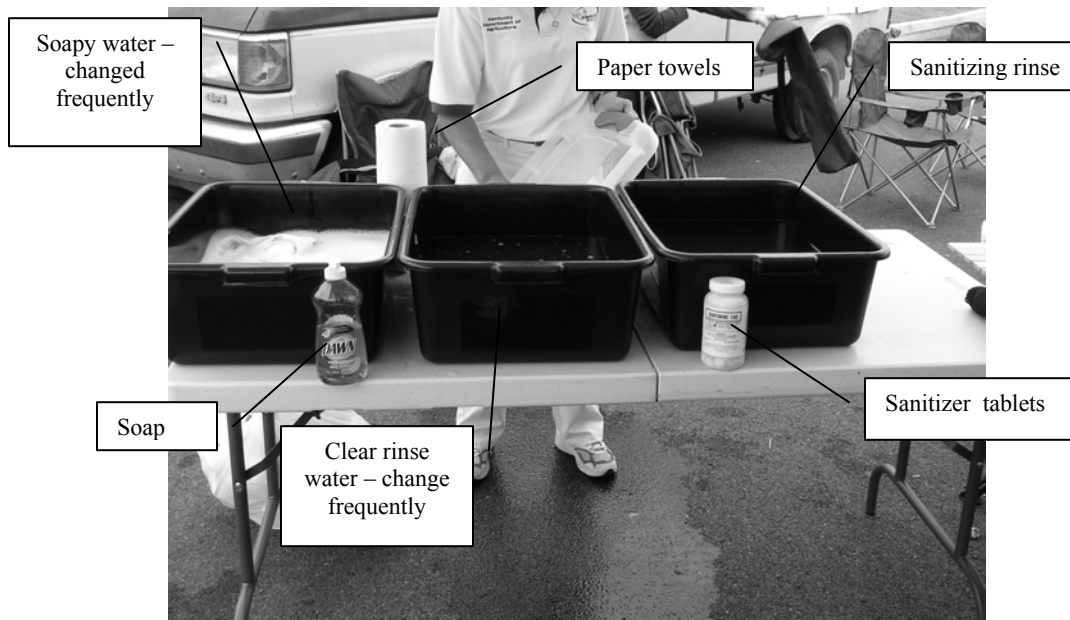
Kentucky's requirements as they apply to chef cooking demonstrations and sampling

I. If a market is not under cover, the market needs to provide a tent or umbrella for the demonstration. The product needs to be under that cover at all times.

II. Food products should not be exposed to insects or other environmental contaminants such as dust. If electricity is available, a fan may be used to keep a gentle breeze going to keep insects off the product. (The chef may appreciate the fan as well.) Covering product in some manner at all times will also deter insects. Though a screened enclosure provides the best protection from insects, it does separate the chef from the customers and this may not have the desired effect on consumer buying. It is important that you recognize that, depending upon the season and/or current weather conditions, there may be some occasions in which a screened enclosure may be the only option for providing adequate food and utensil protection from insects.

III. During the event the chef will need a way to wash his/her hands. A simple, health department-approved set up could consist of an elevated 5-gallon container of potable water that is equipped with a turn-spout dispenser or drain, with a catch bucket placed below the container. Liquid soap and disposable towels should also be provided at the hand wash station. A separate section of this manual discusses hand wash stations and includes a picture of the simple set up.

IV. Facilities to wash and sanitize all utensils used throughout the day must be available. A three-compartment sanitizing wash station can be easily constructed with three tubs, potable water, soap, and an approved sanitizer. A farmers' market friendly set-up is pictured below. You will find that this set up is wonderfully convenient to clean up after the event. You will need more water than you think so bring an adequate supply. Lots of paper towels are a necessity here since you won't be able to set washed items out to air dry. Remember, utensils must also be protected from insects, dust and other forms of contamination. An extra measure of protection for clean utensils, food, and food-related items can be accomplished by storing the items in a plastic container with a tight-fitting lid.



Sanitizer tablets make sanitizing easy. These are available from restaurant supply stores. You may also utilize regular (unscented) household bleach for sanitization. Generally, one cap full of bleach per gallon of water will provide you with an effective sanitizing solution.

V. All product must be maintained at safe hot and cold temperatures throughout the entire event. The rule of thumb is to “keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.” Coolers and plenty of ice should be available. Coolers cannot be made of Styrofoam as these coolers are impossible to disinfect. At no time should any product sit in pooled water. You will need to have provisions for melted ice to drain away from the product.

Serving the samples to your customers

Each sample needs to be pre-cut, adequately protected from insects and other forms of contamination, and served individually. That is, each sample needs to be placed in an individual cup or plate or served with individual toothpicks. (You should provide plenty of waste containers to dispose of these items.) At no time should a customer be able to touch any sample that is not theirs. A helper that controls the samples is important and

will prevent any cross contamination and will allow the chef to “sell” the product. That helper should be careful to avoid touching the product and avoid contamination of any utensils used to portion out the samples.

How do we decide how many samples to prepare for?

A little research may be necessary to answer this question. Traffic counts may have to be taken. During our events in the summer of 2005 we found that 100-150 was a minimum.

Promotion of the Event

KDA sponsored several chef demonstrations at farmers’ markets during the summer of 2005. By trying different promotional avenues a promotional model for these types of events has been developed. The objective was to bring customers to the market that were not already frequent customers and to improve the sale of a particular product or introduce a new product to the market. No single plan works in every venue but we did learn a thing or two about pulling off a successful event.

As with any event the goal has to be clear. The answer to why the market is spending money on this event should be evident and all decisions regarding the event should first examine which direction will meet the goal. It may be hard to justify any expense that doesn’t increase sales. The best way to increase sales is to bring new customers to the market. Who these customers are and how to reach them should be foremost in deciding which media to use in your promotion.

We promoted our events several ways. The first was to develop a press release explaining why this event was special and different from what has been done in the past. We sent these releases to all local media in the area. We included names and phone numbers for KDA folks and the name and phone number of a local market/producer contact.

Secondly, we bought an ad in the local paper that again emphasized that a famous chef would be offering a free cooking demonstration at the market. We included a graphic of some kind in the ad to set it apart from those with just words.

Thirdly, we printed large-lettered signs that were mounted on yard sign wires announcing the event. We made 20 of these and placed them up and down the main road leading to the market the morning of the event. Since research has shown that most folks stop for the first time at a farmers’ market by driving past rather than as a response to advertising, we really tried to have a bunch of these. Each sign had no more than three words on them in large, bold type. We found this to be the most effective thing we did.

At the event, we had a large sign identifying the chef and what she was preparing. We emphasized where in the market you could buy the featured product(s). We had plenty of copies of the featured recipes with the name and contact information for the producers as well as market days and times.

Having staff assigned to act as servers worked wonderfully by ensuring safe handling of the samples and someone to answer questions, handle the crowd, and “talk up” the product.

You may not want to include all these parts in your promotional plan, but the local media always showed up at the events and many stories with pictures appeared after the event and some television and radio stations covered the event as well.

Other Tips

- Time limit your event to about 2-3 hours and start about the time the market opens.
- If yours is a morning market remind your chef that some recipes are just not “morning food.”
- The chef and volunteers will need time to clean up. Extra volunteers here are important.
- Let the chef park close to the demonstration site so they can load and unload easily.
- Use the event to do short surveys. Did you reach your goal? Ask how many persons are new to the market or only come rarely.
- The chef should be located so customers must walk through the market to get to the event. This causes more customers to pass more vendors.
- Have fun!

Our supply list for chef sampling events – Depending on the market some of these things can be eliminated

tent, if market not under cover
screened booth or a quiet box fan (if there is electricity) for insect control
plastic container with tight-fitting lids to protect utensils from contamination
potable water – at least 15 gallons (you can’t have too much)
three-compartment wash, rinse, and sanitize set-up
dish soap
sanitizer tablets or regular (unscented) household bleach
hand wash station
hair nets or caps for individuals who are involved in food preparation or cooking
grill, hot plate, or other portable cooking utensil
metal stem meat thermometer to ensure proper cooking temperatures
an adequate supply of ice
food service gloves – medium and large
two coolers to use to store ice, product and use to set up hand wash station on
two tables
table cloths
hot pads/pot holders
trays for samples
several sets of tongs
trash bags
sani-wipes

paper towels (minimum of three rolls)

individual serving cups or plates

disposable forks/spoons or toothpicks

trash cans – one for the chef and one for samplers

tape

chef/restaurant sign

road/yard signs

business cards to give to media for further contacts

copies of the recipes

extension cord

aprons and hats for servers

The chef should be told to bring all equipment for the food preparation (i.e. knives, skillets, bowls etc.)

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